



Start the spin cycle

It's crunch-time and British Columbians may finally see things heat up. There may have been no devastating blows dealt in the leaders' debate, but reactions to it will give the parties focus through the rest of the race. Our panel of political pundits take a look at how parties will manage the possibilities. Stories by Robyn Dickens

If you listened to the radio yesterday you likely heard the B.C. Liberals' ad campaign calmly stating how the province is in such good hands. It was a continuation of Gordon Campbell's measured tone in the leaders' debate the night before.

And it's likely the Liberals will stay calm for the rest of the campaign, said Catherine Murray, SFU communications professor.

"They're currently in the front-runner position and unless there's a major *faux pas*, it's unlikely they'll change their tone," Murray said.

Post-debate polls gave NDP leader Carole James the edge. However, people polled also indicated they think Campbell is the better choice when it comes to leading the province.

Unless new poll numbers start to show more support for the NDP, the Liberals will maintain cruise control, said political pundit Michael Geoghegan.

"Campbell seems to be comfortably maintaining an eight-point margin... and I didn't see anything that indicated James was going to make up some big ground," Geoghegan said.

If there is a shift, however, expect to see more hard-hitting Liberal ads about B.C.'s economy flash, he added.

"For the Liberals it's 'hey, it's the economy, stupid,'" said Geoghegan, adding that the Liberals now have to make sure supporters don't get too complacent and forget to drop their vote the Liberals' way.

"That's what I would focus on as a Liberal strategist," he said.

With the Liberals on her right and NDP on her left, Adriane Carr got in a few shots in Tuesday's debate, but where she leads her campaign in the next few days will determine if her party gets a representative in government.

Her strategy is clear – hunt for a couple of seats, said Catherine Murray, communications expert.

To reach enough people to gain those seats, Carr needs to spend the rest of the campaign demonstrating she is the best on her one issue – the environment.

"Carr has got to be on the ground, door to door, in swing ridings and on environmental issues," Murray explained. "She has to be out in every single community where there's a water advisory."

Fish farms, forestry and renewable resources are also areas where Carr needs to concentrate her efforts. And since the Green Party doesn't have a record to bash or baggage to carry, Carr had less pressure on her during the debate.

"Carr obviously went into this with the least to lose, so when you're in that situation, I think it puts you in a situation where you can be more animated and be a bit more dynamic," said political pundit Michael Geoghegan.

Twelve per cent support is the best the Green Party has ever mustered in B.C., but despite the party's best efforts, it won't necessarily equate to a seat in the Legislature.

"I don't see the Green Party as having enough localized support anywhere (to win a seat)," Geoghegan said.

Although NDP Leader Carole James performed well in the debate, her platform may not hold much water with voters.

"The problem facing her is that there's not much platform differentiation with the Green Party, and the issue is if the NDP will waver a bit," said communications expert Catherine Murray.

"If she's smart, she'll stay on track with Gordon Campbell's broken promises."

But she needs to make sure she doesn't get too repetitive or people will tune out, Murray warned.

"The issue facing (the NDP) is whether they'll become more hard-hitting on (Campbell's) leadership. But, it's also a double-edged sword," she explained, because it's not clear what James' capacity as a leader is yet.

The NDP, like the Liberals, will be watching the media closely to help guide the direction of the last two weeks of the campaign, said pundit Michael Geoghegan, who thinks the NDP will stick to the track and hammer home their message, which is: "Can you trust Gordon Campbell? What is he going to privatize next?"

And as for James' apparent victory, Geoghegan said she succeeded in getting her face known.

"Now they've got a much better idea of who she is, and so for those inclined to vote NDP, it was a reassuring image she put forward," he added. "She could end up bringing (the NDP) back from two seats to 20 seats, up to 30 seats, when you can start leading a strong opposition."

24
hours
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Trail

Quotable

"We all have to have five servings of fruits and vegetables a day."

- Gordon Campbell gives health advice during the leadership debate

Voting made easy

If you're confused about the Single Transferable Vote, you're not alone.

But a UBC mechanical engineer is trying to make the STV process a little easier to understand before British Columbians vote on it this month.

UBC professor Anthony Hodgson has helped design www.demochoice.org, a website that walks voters through a mock election using the STV. On the website voters rank candidates from their electoral districts just as they would with a STV ballot.

It's important that people know how the system works before they vote on it.

"The more people look into it, the more interesting it becomes," he said. With the STV, "people won't feel the need to vote tactically anymore, where they vote for someone they don't want, just to prevent someone they really don't want from getting in."

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Bricks...

B.C. Rail is a hot topic of debate, or so NDP Cariboo North candidate Bob Simpson would like. Simpson wrote a formal letter requesting a debate the North over the railway company yesterday, saying residents in the area deserve to discuss the economy of privatization.

Get in the game

Feeling ambitious? You can barnstorm B.C. yourself – if you spend \$14.95 to download an election-simulation computer game. "Premier Forever" joins lineup from Vancouver software company 80soft.com that includes "President Forever" and British Canadian and Australian versions of "Prime Minister Forever."

online poll

What trait is most important in a leader?

- Fashion
- Integrity
- Charisma

Wednesday's question

Who won last night's debate?

- James - 58%
- Campbell - 39%
- Carr - 3%